Column: Students should strive for sustainability, lower energy consumption

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Body

Recently, The Daily Gamecock published an article about USC's partnership with Siemens in order to cut down on energy consumed across campus. The article stated that USC will save "over $8 million over the next 15 years" due to renovations being made to buildings that consume the most amount of energy, such as Thomas Cooper Library and the Close-Hipp Building.

Students who live on campus don't see the cost of the energy they consume, which begs the question: why should college students care about energy consumption?

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency , most of the electricity generated in the United States is created through the use of fossil fuels. This includes coal and natural gas. Even though this might seem like a sustainable energy source, it is not environmentally friendly as it releases nitrous oxide into the atmosphere, contributing to acid rain or even smog.

In order to promote a more sustainable USC and environment, students should be wary of the energy they are responsible for consuming, such as electricity. Trying to save energy is the first step in lowering our carbon footprint as students and as a university.

Even though South Carolina summers can be hot and humid, students should start by raising their thermostat by a few degrees. The University of Colorado Boulder has urged students to try methods of natural ventilation in light of this. They recommend using fans or even opening the windows. Just a few degrees of a difference on a thermostat, even in the winter, can make a massive change in energy consumption.

A simple way to save energy is to remember to turn off the lights when a student leaves their apartment or dorm. Even if a student is home and not in that specific room, turning off a light can make a drastic impact. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, a benefit of turning off a light is that it can make the room cooler, as some lights function by giving off heat as energy.

Another way for students to save energy is to unplug appliances when they are not in use. This includes common appliances that might be found in a dorm or USC student's apartment, such as the microwave, hairdryer, coffee maker or air fryer. If an appliance is consistently plugged in, it might be generating ambient power.

According to The Earth & I, ambient power is also known as "the energy available in the surrounding environment." They also state that this ambient power is responsible for about 10% of the cost of an average energy bill. In order for students to save energy and keep those utility payments down, they need to remember to unplug those cords when resting in a socket.

Students can also save energy by taking shorter and colder showers. By reducing the amount of hot water consumed, the energy used during showers is also reduced. According to Aveeno, taking shorter and colder showers can benefit a student's skin as well. They also state that "for every two minutes your shower is shortened, around 10 gallons of water are saved." This might not seem like a lot but a little bit of water might just go a long way when cutting down on energy consumption.

Saving energy can be simple and easy. The first step is to make these tasks a habit. Students can try getting into the routine of turning off the lights before leaving for classes or unplugging appliances after use. After consistently doing these energy saving behaviors, they might adapt into a long term habit.

Drifting toward a more sustainable campus should be a goal for students. Saving energy, no matter how big or how small, is a great way to start.

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